

LTC To

Col Abel

from

Gary Powers

father

probably early 1961

from

SPY TRADER

E. H. COOKRIDGE

Walker & Co N.Y.

1971

viction that his masters in Moscow would find ways and means to rescue him. Even when his spirit appeared to flag after the dismissal of his appeal by the Supreme Court, during his prolonged imprisonment, and when Hoover repeated his offer, believing that Abel had been sufficiently softened, and promised to try and bring his wife out of the Soviet Union if Abel desired it, the master spy was unmoved. He remained steadfast in his determination to have no truck with the F.B.I. or the C.I.A. It was then that Allen Dulles remarked with grudging admiration, 'I wish we had a couple of guys like Abel in Moscow ...'

If J. Edgar Hoover and Allen Dulles considered the possibility of 'turning' Abel, they realised that this seasoned and high-ranking K.G.B. operator was a very different man from the communist defectors with whom they had clinched deals in the past. Allen Dulles, who had a rational and pragmatic approach to the game he had played all his life, eventually favoured Abel's exchange for American prisoners held behind both the Iron and Bamboo Curtains. Already in 1958, when Abel first suggested it to Donovan, the possibility was broached of exchanging him in return for Americans imprisoned in China. Abel said that Pandit Nehru, the Prime Minister of India, or the Government of another neutral country, might be willing to mediate such an exchange.

If Allen Dulles was willing to consider it, his brother, John Foster Dulles, the Secretary of State, frowned at even the hint of such a transaction. He wanted no truck with Moscow or Peking, which would have left the communists the winners both in the value of the commodity gained and in obtaining political prestige in the eyes of the world. But after President Kennedy moved into the White House and Dean Rusk became Secretary of State, the situation changed.

Several months earlier there had been a significant exchange of letters between Mr. Oliver Powers, the pilot's father, and Abel. Before he went to Moscow to attend his son's trial, and impressed by the facilities the Soviet Government provided for his visit, Mr. Powers—advised by journalists who constantly beseeched him for interviews—decided to write the following letter:

Dear Colonel Abel,

I am the father of Francis Gary Powers who is concerned with the U-2 incident ... I am quite sure that you are familiar with the pilot who is currently held by the Soviet Union on an espionage charge.

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Operation Overflight

Para excerpted from book, the Spy Trade

by

E.H.Cookridge(pseudo)

Walker and Co N.Y.1971

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CHAPTER THREE

Operation Overflight

ON May 1, 1960, Francis Gary Powers, a thirty-year-old United States Air Force pilot seconded for service with the Central Intelligence Agency, was carrying out a 3,800-mile U-2 flight from the air base at Peshawar in Pakistan across the Soviet Union to Bodö in Norway. Just short of Sverdlovsk, rather more than half-way to his destination, his plane was shot down and he baled out. He did not press the 'Destruct' button, so that the plane landed in such a condition that it could be examined by experts and later put on show. Powers himself was captured immediately and taken first to the local police station and then to Moscow's dreaded Lubyanka prison, for interrogation.

Powers told the K.G.B. men that he was an American pilot, engaged on weather reconnaissance, that he had taken off from an United States Air Force base in Pakistan and owing to faulty navigation flew deeply into Russia. His interrogators took it with a smile, and told him that they knew all worth knowing about U-2 planes and their real purpose.

With a speed inferring that plans had been readied in advance, awaiting only the successful bringing down of a U-2 without harming the pilot, the Soviet propaganda machine was turned to maximum output. Moscow announced to the world 'the deliberate provocation by American warmongers, an act of blatant spying, one of many instances of American invasion of Soviet air space for espionage purposes...'

The Soviet Government was, of course, perfectly aware that at least two years earlier the United States had achieved a major breakthrough in air reconnaissance with U-2 overflight techniques. Soviet spies throughout the world had been supplying details about the many bases from which U-2s regularly took off; Soviet radar stations and Soviet air force patrols reported about sighting U-2s over many parts of the country. The Soviet Government had been protesting to several countries that American planes flew from bases in West Germany, Britain, Norway, Turkey, Greece, Iran, Pakistan and Japan; the allegations were either denied or ignored by Washington and the American clients, who derived many advantages

Just what constitutes trespass of a nation's air space is not internationally defined. How low an overland flight has to be to rank as an unfriendly or hostile act is as difficult for lawyers and diplomats to decide as how high makes the flight innocuous. The subject is infinitely more difficult to solve than that of the sovereignty of a state over its marginal sea waters. This was originally fixed as one marine league because that was regarded as the maximum range of a gun. The minimum claim is three miles from low water mark, and for many countries is extended to twelve miles.

On the question of sovereignty over air space it appears unlikely that an international court could be expected to define the minimum acceptable height for an unarmed air vehicle, and it would be equally difficult for a court to declare what equipment constituted armaments and what did not. Prior to the Second World War British counter-intelligence was perfectly aware that the transatlantic Zeppelins on passenger service between Bremen and New York regularly drifted, with engines silent, on night flights over the Scapa Flow area of Scotland where infra-red photographs were taken. British Security also noted the fact that air crews on the civil flights by the Nazi-controlled service between German towns and Croydon were changed every week in 1938 and 1939, a simple method of familiarising pilots and navigators with the bomber route to London, but an official protest would have been inappropriate and any formal action futile.

Today with more than 4,000 satellites launched into space, and half of them still orbiting, several nations have 'invaded' other nations' air space. The two super powers, the United States and the U.S.S.R., with several hundreds of satellites circling the earth solely for spying purposes, have been joined by Britain, France, Canada, Australia, Japan and communist China in developing highly sophisticated photographic and recording satellites for just this use. No country ever officially admits the real purpose of such satellites. The Americans usually provide seemingly detailed description of their purposes, such as 'to conduct experiments in meteorology, navigation, geodesy, earth resources management, study of magnetic fields, cosmic rays, solar and cosmic radiation, measuring and monitoring Solar X-rays and ultra-violet emissions, the earth's radiation belts, air density, the earth's gravitational fields' and so forth. The Russians, although giving much less exact information, had on some occasions blandly announced that, for instance, their Molniya satellites orbiting rather closely to the earth and described as communication satellites, serve 'photographic reconnaissance'.

No country has complained about these 'spies in orbit', no attempt to shoot them down or divert their routes has ever been reported. However, even after a decade of the Space Age and the ever increasing use of orbital reconnaissance, more conventional methods of 'spying from the air' have not been abandoned but are being improved and enhanced.

To gather intelligence in the Iron Curtain countries, the Western Powers, after 1945, were faced with very different problems than was communist espionage in its efforts to obtain secret information in the free world. By the end of the war there were no American and British agents in the Soviet Union, while the Russians had many existing spy nets in the West, which were quickly reorganised and vastly strengthened. The American C.I.A. and the British S.I.S. had to start from scratch. At first, the only means to place their agents behind the Iron Curtain was by infiltration of secret agents, a task which proved extremely difficult because of the nature of the communist police states, with rigid supervision of strangers and restrictions of movement within their frontiers. The C.I.A. greatly relied on the organisation set up by a former chief of Hitler's espionage, General Reinhard Gehlen¹ who recruited and trained many East Europeans among displaced persons in Germany and turned them into spies, sending them across the Iron Curtain, or parachuting them into the Soviet Union and other communist countries. Most of them were, however, caught on landing or soon afterwards. The reason for this was that the Western intelligence services were using for such missions members of the so-called White-Russian and Ukrainian anti-communist exile organisations, such as the N.T.S.² and O.U.N.R. which had been infiltrated by Soviet double-agents. Soviet intelligence was usually well informed of the plans and preparations for such operations and the unfortunate parachute-agents floated down to 'reception teams' of the Soviet security police.

General Gehlen continued operations on behalf of the C.I.A. for a considerable time, successfully turning round Russian defectors and inducing them to parachute to their homeland as Western agents, but he later concentrated on sending spies by land into Soviet-occupied East Germany, Czechoslovakia and Poland. C.I.A. missions of a similar kind were organised by one of its special departments headed by the Deputy Director of Plans, Frank Gardiner Wisner. By 1956 he fell ill, eventually resigned and died in 1965 as the result of a self-inflicted gunshot.

¹ See p. 164.

² See Abbreviations and Glossary, pp. 279-282.

The British S.I.S. did not participate in the C.I.A.-Gehlen link-up and from the outset of the cold war decided to 'go it alone'. Indeed, the British were the first to initiate spying overflights of the Soviet Union. In 1953 Western intelligence agencies gathered information indicating that the Russians were making tests of long-range missiles in West Kazakhstan, north of the Caspian Sea. The S.I.S. arranged for sending from West German bases R.A.F. Canberra bombers with photographic equipment on high altitude flights over the suspected sites. The British aircraft safely landed in Iran, but the photographs taken proved to be fuzzy and of dubious value. One of the Canberras had been intercepted, hit by anti-aircraft fire and narrowly escaped a crash.

The Americans had taken up the idea of air reconnaissance and expanded it on a vast scale. After General Eisenhower was elected in 1952 as the new President of the United States, and John Foster Dulles became his Secretary of State with Allen Welsh Dulles as Director of the C.I.A., authorisation was given for the manufacture of aircraft which could fly far above any known reach of enemy interception. A top secret committee was set up, with Wisner and Richard Mervin Bissell, a Yale professor of economics, as its driving powers.

Some of America's most distinguished aviation experts were called in, among them Clarence L. 'Kelly' Johnson, chief designer of the Lockheed Aircraft Corporation, Dr. James Killian, of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and Dr. Edwin H. Land, President of the Polaroid Corporation, the latter being entrusted to devise the photographic equipment. Johnson was told to design and construct an aircraft with every speed possible, money no object, to replace the RB-47, which had been hitherto sporadically used for overflight missions. His brief was to produce an aircraft 'capable of flying above the range of all known rockets and interceptors'. The prototype was flying within nine months of the project starting, with draughtsmen, engineers and workmen, sworn to secrecy, working a 100-hour week and drawing double rates of the highest wages ever paid in American aviation industry. It was the fastest completion of aircraft design and construction on record.

Thus 'Utility Two', or U-2, was born, and in April 1956, United States Air Force First Lieutenant Francis Gary Powers, had become a civilian N.A.C.A. pilot, engaged on flying 'weather reconnaissance' missions. He had become 'Mr. Francis G. Palmer', and given identity documents, including even a Social Security card and an income tax certificate in his new name. After a rigorous training he

started his secret duties culminating in the historic overflight from Pakistan to Norway. The earlier short 'go and return' flights made by all the pilots operational from Incirlik in Turkish Anatolia were useful and, in the eyes of their C.I.A. bosses, fully justified the enterprise on which the United States Administration was spending vast sums of money. Hundreds of miles of film provided a detailed pictorial survey of large areas of the Soviet Union taken from a height of more than thirteen miles above the earth.

But Powers' flight on May 1, 1960, was the first attempt at crossing Soviet territory from south to north. Its failure resulted in a major political catastrophe and provided Krushchev with the welcome pretext to blow up the Summit meeting in Paris. The Soviet leaders exploited their propaganda initiative for ten days. Then President Eisenhower had to make the humiliating admission that the spying flights were taking place and to declare that the flight in question was executed without his prior knowledge.

The Soviet leaders, as Powers' interrogations later proved, knew much more about the U-2 operations than Washington suspected in its wildest dreams. Only after the damage was done the leak was traced to an incident which occurred a long time before at the Atsugi base in Japan. In September 1959 a U-2 pilot returning from an overflight ran out of fuel less than ten miles south of the base and made an emergency landing at a small airstrip of the local glider club of Yokohama. He stayed in the cockpit and used his radio to alert the Atsugi base. But it took quite a time before help arrived and United States military policemen dispersed at gun-point the large crowd which had assembled around the aircraft stuck in the mud. The Japanese, handy with their photo cameras, were meanwhile taking pictures, and there is little doubt that quite a few reached Soviet agents. The K.G.B. had not only current reports from its spies who had collected at least some information at the many U-2 bases around the world—and probably also at the home bases of the U-2 establishments in Nevada, Texas and California—but it also now had a series of good photographs of the aircraft, pictures which even American personnel was strictly forbidden to take lest they might fall into enemy hands.

The wreck of Powers' U-2 was put on display in Moscow's Gorki Park and hundreds of thousands flocked to glare at the evidence of 'imperialist perfidy'. Krushchev went to the Paris Summit meeting with the obvious intention to break it up. He eventually suggested another Summit in eight months' time, knowing that by then

probably by the Democrat Kennedy. The political pot was kept to simmer for three months before Powers was put on trial on August 17, 1960, in the Hall of Columns of the giant Palace of the Trade Unions, in front of 2,000 spectators. Powers, blinking in the glare of television spotlights, glanced at his wife and his parents, who were given front seats, listened to the interminable speeches of his accusers, and contritely pleaded guilty. To extract all the propaganda value possible the trial was stretched out to three days. Dramatically, the chief prosecutor, General Roman Andreyevich Rudenko³ declared: 'With the accused man the reactionary leaders of the United States stand, though invisibly, in the dock ... They have deliberately prepared the aggressive intrusion of the U-2 in order to prevent the easing of international tension and in order to breathe new life into their war-mongering cold war policy, and to torpedo the Paris Summit.'

The sentence was ten years of confinement, the first three to be served in prison, the remainder in a detention camp. The charges against Powers carried the death sentence and the punishment was surprisingly light. The president of the court stated that, although the prosecution had demanded a much more severe sentence the court 'had taken into consideration the accused's sincere confession of his guilt and his sincere repentance ... and proceeding from the principles of Socialist humaneness decided on leniency'.

It soon became clear that the punishment was designed to enable the Soviet Government and the K.G.B. to manipulate Gary Powers for their secret purposes: as a pawn in the game of spy exchanges. The press of the free world reported every detail of the trial and everything it could discover on the hitherto secret overflight operations by the U-2 spy planes. The stories made first-rate copy, but few editors and reporters realised that they were playing the hand Moscow had been guiding for precisely the kind of publicity it had carefully planned.

Such was the background of the U-2 incident. Only some time later the free world began to recognise that a far more dramatic theme of power politics and a sinister plan for freeing one of the most valuable Soviet spies was woven into the pattern that the K.G.B. had so expertly designed.

³ He was one of the Allied prosecutors at the Nuremberg trial of Nazi war-criminals in 1946.

A SECRET DATE

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You can readily understand the concern that a father would have for his son and for the strong desire to have my son released and brought home . . . I would be more than happy to approach the State Department and the President of the United States for an exchange for the release of my son. By this I mean that I would urge and do everything possible to have my government release you and return you to your country if the powers in your country would release my son and let him return to me.

If you are inclined to go along with this arrangement I would appreciate your so advising me and also advising the powers in your country along these lines.

Abel must have been gratified by it, but he did not betray his feelings in his reply of which he sent a copy to Donovan. He wrote:

Dear Mr. Powers,

Much as I appreciate and understand your concern for the safety and return of your son, I regret to say that . . . I am not the person to whom your request should have been directed. Obviously, this should be my wife. Unfortunately, by order of the Department of Justice, I am not permitted to write to my family and so cannot convey your request to them directly.

Donovan released the texts of these letters to the press. This was a deliberate move, not only on his part, but on that of the American authorities taken with the explicit approval of the State Department and the intelligence agencies. While opposed to the exchange suggestions, John Foster Dulles wanted to test public opinion, which appeared strongly in favour of the rescue of the young pilot, threatened by terrible punishment in Russia. The result of the press release was that every newspaper in the United States, followed by the entire world press with the exception in the communist countries, next day splashed across the front pages headlines such as POWERS-FOR-ABEL SPY SWAP—U.S. GOVERNMENT STUDIES PROPOSAL BY U-2 PILOT'S FATHER. The public reaction seemed to be favourable, there were few voices which branded such an exchange as unethical. Most people were more concerned about bringing Powers home than about legalistic or even moral problems.

The newspaper stories were, however, running ahead of real events. The State Department was far from rushing things. There were also weighty handicaps to overcome even before negotiations, directly or indirectly, could begin. The Soviet Government had